

Luke 24:1-12 The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Jesus was dead. He had been severely beaten, then scourged, then crucified. To make sure that he was dead, a soldier pierced his side with a spear. Joseph, Nicodemus, and others had taken his dead body down from the cross, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a new tomb. They had not finished the job of preparing Jesus' body for burial, so a few women planned to return to the tomb early on Sunday morning.

Jesus' death had left his disciples in a state of shocked disappointment. He had entered Jerusalem just a few days before to great fanfare and support. Thousands of people proclaimed him as their king. Many fervently, sincerely believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Yet the authorities had arrested him, tried him, and put him to death. That seemed to show that all of Jesus' claims amounted to nothing. He was apparently not able to save himself, let alone save others. At the end of the day on Friday, all seems to have been lost. Jesus' death seems to have proven that he was a fraud and that all his followers were deceived.

Had the story about Jesus ended with his death, we would not be here today. The entire Christian faith depends on what happened next. Had Jesus died the death of a common criminal, and had that been the end of the story, we most likely would never have heard of him. If what the Gospels record after the crucifixion did not happen, then Christianity is a fraud. But if the Gospel accounts are true, then Jesus is exactly whom he claimed to be—the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Savior.

Luke 24 tells us what happened when the women returned to the tomb early on Sunday morning. What happened was something totally unexpected. Instead of finding a partially decomposed body in the tomb, they found an empty tomb, and they found angels questioning why they were seeking the living among the dead. They heard those magnificent words, "He is not here, but is risen."

The resurrection of Jesus is the reason we are here today. It's the reason the church began and has persisted for nearly 2000 years. And it's the reason we are convinced that Jesus is whom he claimed to be. The resurrection validates Jesus' claims and proves him to be the Savior. We are celebrating that fact today.

As we consider the resurrection of Jesus as recorded in first 12 verses of Luke 24, we should notice that this part of the account revolves around the experience of a group of women. At the end of chapter 23, we find a group of women who had helped with Jesus' burial. Their plan was to return to the tomb on Sunday morning and finish the job of preparing Jesus' body for burial. Early on Sunday morning, they travel to the tomb and find it empty.

Why is the presence of these women significant? You are probably aware that in the ancient world, the testimony of women was not held in high regard. In fact, women could not testify in a court of law. So if you were making up a mythology regarding Jesus' resurrection, the last thing you would do is base the story on the testimony of women. If you wanted people to believe your story, you would say that reliable men were the first to visit the empty tomb and the first to see Jesus. The fact that the Gospel accounts record women as the first to see the empty tomb and the first to encounter Jesus after the resurrection shows that this is not a legendary, mythological story. This is a believable account because women are the first on the scene.

Let's see how this group of women were so critical to the resurrection account.

I. .1 The women display their devotion to Jesus.

In a certain way, the women show great love and devotion to Jesus. Even after his death seemingly proved him not to be the Messiah, they were still willing to care for his body. They wanted to give him a decent burial.

However, in another sense, they should have expected Jesus to rise on the third day. They should have gone to the tomb expecting to see Jesus come out of it. If they had remembered what Jesus had said, and if they truly believed that Jesus' words were true, they would have been there, not to anoint his dead body, but to greet him as he came out of the tomb. Unfortunately, like the other disciples, they either forgot his words or did not really believe them.

A. .1 They arrived at the tomb early on Sunday morning. They had started for the tomb before sunrise, and the sun had risen by the time they arrived (Mk 16:2).

BTW, we worship on Sundays today because the resurrection happened on a Sunday. That change, from worshipping on the Sabbath to worshipping on the first day of the week, argues for the reality of the resurrection. We worship on Sunday to celebrate/memorialize Jesus' resurrection.

Of course, we can worship God anywhere at any time. But Sunday is resurrection day, and I think we should reserve the Lord's Day as a special and sacred day of worship.

B. .1b They were carrying the materials needed to prepare Jesus' body for burial. Nicodemus had brought a good amount of it on Friday afternoon, but apparently not quite enough.

C. .2-3 They found the stone rolled away from the door and the tomb empty.

1. This stone would have been very large and very heavy. In fact, the women were wondering how they'd get in the tomb. They knew that someone would have to roll the stone away from the door.
2. But when they arrived, they found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty.
3. Note the words in verse 3: they "found not the body of the Lord Jesus."

We need to pause here and ask the question: what provides the best explanation for the absence of Jesus' body. It was in the tomb, sealed against tampering, and guarded by a group of soldiers. Yet early on Sunday morning, the tomb is empty; Jesus' body is gone.

What accounts for this? Did the *Roman* authorities take it? No, they had sealed the tomb and authorized the soldiers to guard the tomb against any foul play. Did the *Jews* take Jesus' body? No, they wanted to ensure that his body remained in the tomb. Had the Romans or the Jews taken the body, the easiest way to disprove a resurrection claim would have been to produce the body. Maybe the *disciples* took it. In that case, you'd have to explain how the disciples overpowered the guards. Also, most of the disciples lost their lives because they believed in the resurrection. If they knew it was a hoax, they'd not do that.

The only reasonable explanation that fits the facts is that Jesus rose bodily from the dead. We are here today because it is absolutely reasonable to believe that the only explanation for the empty tomb is that Jesus rose from the dead.

- II. .4a The women were "much perplexed" regarding the empty tomb.

They didn't expect the stone to be rolled away, and they didn't expect the tomb to be empty. They expected a dead body, probably one that had decomposed a good bit since Friday afternoon.

Quote: The women came to the tomb to make sure that Jesus' body had been adequately prepared for burial, not to welcome the risen Lord with a rendition of the "Hallelujah Chorus."¹

It appears that no one was expecting Jesus to rise again.

III. .4b The women encounter two men "in shining garments."

Luke doesn't say that these men are angels, but Matthew does (Mt 28:2, 4).

A. The grammar here suggests that the two angels stepped up or appeared suddenly to these women. So here's another unexpected and surprising turn of events.

B. The angels were dressed in "shining/dazzling garments." The word "shining" is based on the same root word as "lightning." So the garments of these angels flashed like lightning. It's the same word used to describe Jesus' appearance at the transfiguration (cf. 9:29).

C. .5 The angels cause great fear. The women respond by bowing their faces to the earth.

You may recall that when the angels appeared to the shepherds when Jesus was born, the text tells us that the men were "sore afraid." These women have the same response.

D. .5b The angels ask why the women were seeking the living among the dead.

1. Tombs are for dead people. Jesus is not in the tomb because he is not dead.

2. This is the first indication that Jesus is living. The tomb was empty because Jesus was alive. He no longer belonged in the tomb because he was no longer dead.

E. .6 The angels assure the women that Jesus "is risen."

1. The angels tell the women the meaning/significance of the empty tomb. The empty tomb, by itself, does not require a resurrection. There may be another explanation. E.g., Mary M thought the gardener might have taken his body away.

¹ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 606.

2. But an empty tomb, accompanied by angels declaring the meaning of the empty tomb, reveals exactly what happened. Jesus was not there and here's the reason why—he "is risen."
3. Obviously, the angels were speaking in *physical* terms. Jesus had been physically dead, and now he was physically living. He was no longer dead; he had risen from the dead.
4. Liberals often suggest that Jesus' resurrection was not physical but symbolic or spiritual. They claim that it was not necessary for Jesus to rise physically/bodily. They claim that Jesus arose in the sense that his disciples retained his teachings. He arose in the sense that his teachings continue to be relevant even after his death.

Of course, such an idea is absurd on the face of it. When the angels tell the women "He is not here, but is risen," they are not talking about some kind of symbolic, mystical, non-physical resurrection. They are proclaiming that Jesus rose bodily from the dead. He who was dead was now alive and not in the tomb. That's the only way we can understand these words.

F. .6b-7 The angels remind them that Jesus had prophesied his death and resurrection.

1. On several occasions, Jesus had told his disciples that he would be killed, buried, and rise again (**read** 9:22, 18:32-33). The women had somehow forgotten what Jesus had said. The angels reminded them of Jesus' words.

App: We should recognize that the authority throughout this passage remains the Word of God—Jesus' words. God foretold through the prophets that this would happen. Jesus himself said that it would happen. After it happened, the angels reminded the women about Jesus' previous words. So the word of God is preeminent throughout this account.

2. .7 Note the language: Jesus "must be delivered..." There was a divine necessity about this course of events. God's plan must come to pass. God's unchangeable decree made Jesus' death necessary.

3. .7b “sinful men” -- Who is responsible for Jesus’ death? Jesus had foretold that “sinful men” would put him to death—people like Judas, Caiaphas, and Pilate. They certainly were responsible; God will hold them accountable for the murder of Jesus.
4. But ultimately, God is responsible for Jesus’ death. Jesus’ sacrificial death was God’s plan from the very beginning. And Jesus laid down his life voluntarily. So we have both human responsibility and divine sovereignty at work here. God’s divine plan was necessary, and the hands of sinful men unwittingly cooperated with that plan.

App: Some people, unfortunately, see the crucifixion of Jesus as a failure of God’s program. When the Jews refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah, God had to go on to plan B. Evil people frustrated the original plan, so God had to figure out something else. Sinful man ruined the plan of God.

But that is an absolutely false way of seeing these events. God had a plan in mind—indeed, an eternal decree—and it required Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. Jesus fulfilled God’s will by offering himself as a sacrifice for sin. This was plan A; there was no plan B. Jesus successfully carried out God’s original plan. These things happened by divine necessity.

5. .8 “they remembered his words.” These women had apparently heard Jesus speak about his death and resurrection. They could think back and recall that he had mentioned this before.
6. But to remember something is not merely to recall it to mind; it also implies that they should understand the meaning of these words. Now they understand what Jesus meant when he said that he would rise again on the third day.
7. It’s a bit puzzling why the disciples did not expect Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus had foretold it on numerous occasions; he had told his disciples repeatedly and directly that all of this would happen. Yet they found Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion totally shocking and unexpected. They apparently did not take him seriously, or they simply failed to understand.

8. This is something of a light rebuke from the angels. They reminded the women that they had heard this before. They should have remembered what Jesus said, and they should have expected Jesus to fulfill his word.

App: Even today, we still need to remember Jesus' words and believe them. These women, along with the other disciples, forgot Jesus' words, failed to believe them, or failed to understand them. We don't want to make that same mistake. We must pay close attention to Jesus' words, remember them, and believe them.

- IV. .9 The women report their experience to the disciples and "to all the rest."
 - A. .10 The women involved were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, and several others who are not named. Immediately after their experience with the empty tomb, they go and tell the disciples.
 - B. .11 But the disciples did not believe their report. They were not easily convinced. They were reluctant to believe; they were skeptical of all these claims.
 1. These women had been traveling with Jesus and the disciples for quite some time. It's likely that the disciples knew them very well. Yet the disciples refuse to believe the report given by these reliable witnesses.
 2. .11 The disciples considered their words to be "idle tales."
 - a) One dictionary defines this word as "twaddle, i.e., an incredible story." Medical writers used this same word to describe the wild talk of those in delirium or hysteria.²
 - b) I.e., the disciples thought this report was sheer nonsense. The disciples did not merely not believe; they thought the report was ridiculous nonsense.
 - c) They felt that way because they knew that Jesus was dead and buried. Dead people simply do not come back to life. They found it impossible to believe this story.

² A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Lk 24:11.

This failure of the disciples to believe the report is an important fact. Critics/skeptics often claim that the disciples made up the story of Jesus' resurrection because they were so fervent in their desire for Jesus to rise again. They expected the resurrection; but when it didn't happen, they agreed together to claim that it did. It's all a great conspiracy.

But this passage shows very clearly that the disciples were reluctant to believe the report of Jesus' resurrection. They not only didn't believe it, but also they ridiculed the whole idea. They had no regard for the report of the women at all. They did not take it seriously or give it any consideration.

In fact, the disciples had to be persuaded by clear and undeniable proof that Jesus had risen from the dead. They had to see it with their own eyes. Thomas demanded to touch Jesus' body to confirm that he had risen.

So it's absolutely absurd to claim that the disciples conspired together to make up this story about Jesus' resurrection. It's ridiculous to suggest that the disciples worked themselves up into a hallucination of Jesus appearing to them.

Quote: By magnifying the disciples' [unbelief], Luke magnified the miracle. Only the clear and unmistakable appearance of the risen Christ could have overcome such doubt and replaced it with unshakable faith.³

In a certain sense, the Gospel story really is unbelievable. Dead men simply do not come back to life. In order for us to believe it, something very powerful must convince us that it's true. It would be nice if angels would appear to us and tell us that it happened. But normally, that doesn't happen. So why do we believe? We believe it because it is true. The facts of the matter are undeniable. And beyond that, the Holy Spirit works in our heart to convince us of the truth of the Gospel. Cf. "Blessed are those who don't see and yet believe." We have good reason for our belief that Jesus rose from the dead.

- V. The women's report motivates Peter to investigate. .12
 - A. Peter perhaps didn't believe the report at first, but he wanted to check out the situation at the tomb for himself.
 - B. He ran to the tomb.

³ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 606.

1. John tells us that he ran along with Peter and actually arrived at the tomb first. John tells us that when he saw the empty tomb, he believed the report that Jesus had risen from the dead. But it does not say that about Peter.
 2. The fact that Peter and John ran directly to the tomb suggests that the location of the tomb was well-known. The idea that the women and Peter and John all showed up at the wrong tomb is absurd. They all went to the right tomb and found it empty.
- C. He looked inside the tomb.
1. So he verified with his own eyes that the tomb was empty and the grave clothes were left behind.
 2. .12b An interesting detail here is that the grave clothes were “laid by themselves.” Had the body been stolen, either by friends or enemies, they would have had no reason to remove the strips of cloths from Jesus’ body. John tells us in his account that the cloth covering Jesus’ head was “folded together in a place by itself.” This is clearly an eye-witness account.
 3. No grave robber would have left the tomb in such a neat and orderly condition. But if Jesus rose from the dead, it makes sense that he would remove the grave clothes and even fold up the cloth that was covering his head. So it’s another detail that argues against the idea that anyone stole the body.
 4. The empty grave clothes, like the empty tomb, gives silent but powerful witness to the resurrection.
- D. .12end He wondered/marveled (θαυμάζω) at these events.

This turn of events was totally unexpected, even for Peter. Luke doesn’t state that Peter believed at this point, but he certainly was thinking deeply about what the empty tomb might mean.

App: Like Peter, we should think deeply about these events. When we consider the empty tomb and the report of the women—what does this mean? The meaning is very clear—Jesus rose from the dead. That fact will become increasingly undeniable as we continue to read this account.

All the hopes of the Christian life are pinned on one event—the resurrection of Jesus. The preaching of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the heart of the Gospel message. Jesus died on the cross for our sins, was buried, and rose again. It's only because that event really happened that we have any hope of eternal life.

As Paul said,

Rom 1:4 *[Jesus is] declared to be the Son of God with power, ... by the resurrection from the dead:*

Perhaps you are a bit like Peter this morning. You are wondering about these things but perhaps not wholly convinced. Peter and the others were skeptical until the evidence became overwhelming—Jesus had risen from the dead. They could not deny it. We cannot deny it either. It's only by accepting that fact that you can be saved. Today would be a great day to trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

I trust that on this Resurrection Sunday, we will all take time to ponder the marvelous news—“He is not here, but is risen.”

And I trust that we will not think of this news as “idle tales” and nonsense, but as absolute, unchangeable, undeniable, verifiable truth. Jesus is risen, he is risen indeed. And it's this great event that we celebrate today.